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## **Communicative Justice and Reconciliation in Canada**

**Alice Neeson**

*International Communities Organisation*

*Communicative justice co-exists with other dimensions of justice and emphasizes the importance of fair communicative practices, particularly after periods of direct or structural violence. While intercultural dialogue is often assumed to be a positive, or even necessary, part of reconciliation processes, there are questions to be asked about the ethicality of dialogue when one voice has been silenced, misrepresented, and ignored for decades. This article draws on twelve months of ethnographic research with reconciliation activists and organizations in Canada and considers the potential for communicative flows to help compensate for structural inequalities during processes of reconciliation.*

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By listening to your story, my story can change. By listening to your story, I can change.  
—— Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Final Report*

**I**n Canada, as in other settler-colonial states over the past two decades, there have been a number of movements toward “reconciliation,” a vague and malleable term that has both official and unofficial forms. Officially, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has attempted the challenging task of “restorying” dominant versions of Canadian history.<sup>1</sup> Truth telling and lived experiences, in the form of testimony and reports shaped from that testimony, have contributed to this task. Unofficially—though often through organized action—digital media has acted as an alternative platform on which to express personal stories and share them with others.

Central to the mandate of the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission was the acknowledgment of residential school experiences, witnessing and promoting truth and reconciliation events, and promoting public awareness of the residential school system and its impacts.<sup>2</sup> Because of the direct and widespread experiences many Indigenous people have with residential schools (with almost one-third of all Indigenous children removed from their families to attend these institutions between the late nineteenth and late twentieth centuries),<sup>3</sup> the implication of these awareness-raising goals was that the responsibility of recognition lay with non-Indigenous Canadians, who were summoned as witnesses to reevaluate dominant historical accounts of Canadian history and dominant narratives about contemporary Indigenous suffering. Similarly, on digital platforms, many Indigenous people used social media and blogging platforms to relate their lived experiences of inequalities, racism, and intergenerational trauma. Non-Indigenous Canadians were frequently the target audience of these posts.

This article introduces the concept of “communicative justice,” which co-exists with other dimensions of justice and emphasizes the importance of fair communicative practices, particularly after periods of direct or structural violence. While intercultural dialogue is often assumed to be a positive, or even necessary, part of reconciliation processes,<sup>4</sup> there are questions

to be asked about the ethicality of dialogue when one voice has been silenced, misrepresented, and ignored for decades. As one Indigenous research participant argued: “When we talk about human rights abuses, both past and ongoing, there is no debate. There is no two way discussion to be had. The settlers . . . have controlled the story for far too long. Now they need to be quiet and listen to Native people, learn from Native people.”<sup>5</sup>

## **Methodology**

This article draws on twelve months of online and “on-foot” ethnographic research. The foot work included the author’s participant observation as a volunteer with several nonprofits working in the field of reconciliation, and seventy-eight semi-structured interviews with activists, reconciliation professionals, Indigenous media practitioners, and non-Indigenous listeners.

## **Communication and Structural Violence**

Social practices and processes are reproduced through narratives, which have the potential to naturalize and sustain inequality. Settler colonialism entrenches and sustains itself through narratives of *terra nullius* and narratives that cast Indigenous people as belonging to the distant past (in which Indigenous people are invisible), while also dehumanizing Indigenous people as troubled or violent and in need of civilization or government intervention (narratives where Indigenous people are visible, but only in ways that support settlement or expansion). This revolving visibility and invisibility of Indigenous people is vital to settler colonialism as a system.

Tom Clark, Ravi de Costa, and Sarah Maddison argue that for most of Australian colonial history, Indigenous people were invisible to most settlers and that “the realities of Indigenous lives today still remain invisible.” Non-Indigenous people rarely see the “violence and vulnerability” that many Indigenous people experience, and when they do, it is in a “limited, contrived” manner that does not allow for the circumstances to be understood as a product of colonialism. Stories that receive media attention, such as the suicide crisis in the Attawapiskat First Nation in northern Ontario, may therefore be understood in a way that continues to place the burden for change on Indigenous people, Indigenous leaders, and Indigenous culture or may be accompanied with calls for state interventions that cast the Canadian state in the role of protector or savior. These interpretations of “Indigenous issues,” Clark and his colleagues argue, are unhelpful to reconciliation: “Indigenous peoples . . . are unlikely to become more widely and deeply interested in reconciling with societies that sporadically pay them attention only to see their suffering as an inherent failing of their cultures and capacities.”<sup>6</sup>

The “sporadic attention” that non-Indigenous Canada pays to Indigenous people can also be interpreted as a deliberate or undeliberate act to facilitate structural or physical violence. Discussing the relationship between a position of distance and the facilitation of wrongdoing in the Australian context, Anna Haebich writes:

We are drawn to reflect on the easy slippage between a mind set that promotes the distancing and dehumanising of targeted out-groups and the acceptance and normalising of their unequal treatment to the extent that it becomes unremarkable and virtually invisible. . . . Thus, large numbers of people can acquiesce to or play facilitating roles in horrific processes without realising or acknowledging the full meaning of what they are tacitly or actively supporting. This state of “knowing and not knowing” is powerful and

obstinate, persisting in the face of circulating knowledges, observable evidence, personal encounters and even protests in the public arena.<sup>7</sup>

When non-Indigenous Canadians are asked about residential schools, they commonly respond: “I didn’t know anything about it”; “This is the first that I’ve heard”; or “We were never taught about this at college.” These responses indicate a self-positioning as “perfect stranger,” where non-Indigenous people deny any relationships with, or knowledge about, Indigenous people.<sup>8</sup> These denials often represent an unwillingness to reflect and engage, rather than an actual lack of knowledge or relationships. For Susan Dion, this seemingly neutral position offers non-Indigenous people a form of protection from recognizing their own implication in colonial structures and thus absolves the “perfect strangers” of any responsibility to act against ongoing colonial violence.<sup>9</sup>

The following is an example of a “perfect stranger” response by a non-Indigenous community worker:

I have utmost respect for Aboriginal culture, but I don’t claim to know much about it, or much about their history. It’s not that I’m not interested, it’s that this stuff was never really taught to us at school. I grew up in a very white neighbourhood, and I’ve just never encountered many Aboriginal people before. So, I don’t think I’m doing them a service to pretend to know a lot about them, and I think it’s better to hold my hands up and say, “I’m sorry, I’m ignorant.”<sup>10</sup>

It could plausibly be suggested that many non-Indigenous people have never had face-to-face encounters or interpersonal relationships with Indigenous people, who make up about 4.3 percent of the population of Canada.<sup>11</sup> Several factors contribute to a social distance between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, particularly social class and residential segregation. But it seems unlikely that someone growing up in Canada would not have read about Indigenous people or have been taught about Indigenous people or have watched news reports or television programs about Indigenous people. One research participant, who had recently emigrated from Romania, expressed disbelief that people who had lived in Canada all their lives could claim to have no knowledge of residential schools. She asked: “How can people not know? I arrived six months ago and I know.”<sup>12</sup> Haebich describes a phenomenon of “collective amnesia” among settler Australians responding to Aboriginal testimony that results from “a peculiar kind of public blindness and practised forgetfulness.” For Haebich, claims of not knowing are spurious because accounts of the Aboriginal Australian stolen generations “were reported and discussed in a range of public domains and were observable in the wider community for those who cared to look.”<sup>13</sup> Similarly, the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission was far from the first body to describe and publicize the suffering of Indigenous people as a result of the residential school system. For decades, films, documentaries, books, radio programs, and news reports have told the stories of residential schools and the suffering they caused to Indigenous people and communities.<sup>14</sup>

Although the majority of non-Indigenous participants were passively supportive of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, many were hesitant to engage with reconciliation movements or activism. One explanation for this reluctance could be an unwillingness to acknowledge a need for political, legal, and economic reforms that would remove the systemic privileges enjoyed by white, non-Indigenous Canadians. A significant minority of participants agreed that radical change would not be in the best interests of non-Indigenous people because it would remove their systemic privileges. It follows that non-Indigenous people may therefore be hostile to the

sort of transformative social change that many Indigenous people believe is fundamental to reconciliation. Acknowledging Indigenous oppression, several participants explained, would create a responsibility to take action—a burden they may be reluctant to carry. For example, one research participant, a forty-nine-year-old engineer employed in the mining industry, said:

I'm in a difficult situation. On one hand, I know that wrongs were done to Native people, and of course it's important that they get recognition for that and an apology—on behalf of all of Canada. But on the other hand, if Native people claim land rights over big swathes of the country—can they then veto infrastructure projects on that land? I work in mining so of course that's a personal concern, but it would also be damaging for the economy as a whole, and I think everyone in this country would be worse off as a result.<sup>15</sup>

The research participant did support compensation for survivors of residential schools and said he believed that the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was significant and valuable but that he did not plan to read the commission's report or attend any of the reconciliation events in his home town.

Only four non-Indigenous participants cited economic, political, or legal reforms as concerns that prevented them from engaging more deeply in reconciliation movements. Some may have been reluctant to admit having these concerns, for fear of appearing prejudiced or self-interested. The “perfect stranger” positioning could be perceived as an easier way of shirking responsibility without the necessity of admitting outright opposition to reforms. But others stressed that while they did support major structural reforms, they had other concerns and emotions that prevented them from engaging more deeply in reconciliation movements.

This perspective helps to account for the popularity of the “perfect stranger” positioning, as well as the continued existence of dominant narratives of Canadian history that present Indigenous suffering as the unintentional side-effect of a benevolent settlement project. As Maddison points out, justifications such as that certain actions “were not seen as wrong at the time” or that certain actions “were undertaken with good intentions” can be used to maintain positive social or national identities.<sup>16</sup> Confronting historical and ongoing violence of the colonial project implicates settler Canadians as a social group, which can pose a threat to identity.<sup>17</sup> Daniel Salée describes non-Indigenous Canadians' feelings toward Indigenous people as the source of a “deep-seated collective anxiety” that often goes unacknowledged “like some shameful condition.” He adds:

The very existence of Indigenous peoples disrupts the liberal image mainstream Canadians have of themselves and their country. It forces them into a rather uncomfortable reassessment of the foundational notions of state and nation they hold dear, of the core values by which they define themselves.<sup>18</sup>

For David C. Williams, collective settler guilt is of “nuclear proportion,” because the guilt does not relate to sporadic or isolated events of wrongdoing, but recognition that the settler colonial state is “rotten to the root.”<sup>19</sup> This can create the need for a total revaluation of what it means to be Canadian. One participant explained: “We don't have a story to replace our old one. The idea of being story-less is scary.”<sup>20</sup> Another non-Indigenous participant described feelings of grief related to a loss of identity:

I suppose I'm in mourning. I'm mourning for the suffering that the Indigenous people in Canada faced, and continue to face in their reserves and in towns and cities across the

country. But I'm also mourning for my own . . . lost identity, I suppose. So much of what I felt was central to being Canadian—being friendly, welcoming, multicultural – has really been challenged by what I've learned in these past few months, and it almost feels like—sorry if this sounds melodramatic—it feels like I don't know who I am anymore.<sup>21</sup>

Indigenous media creators and witness bearers frequently highlight the significance of “claiming a voice,” often connected to the past silencing of Indigenous victims and survivors of human rights abuses.<sup>22</sup> Indigenous bloggers and filmmakers contrast their own vocality with the silence imposed on previous generations through colonial violence, the “stigma of victimisation,”<sup>23</sup> and “cultures of silence.”<sup>24</sup> For media creators, claiming a voice was an act of resistance against a system in which they were ignored, spoken for, or misrepresented. Often, Indigenous people have not been silenced through an absence of speaking but through the absence of listening on the part of the structurally privileged. “Not knowing” about Indigenous people is not an absence of knowledge but a particular kind of knowledge that has been constructed according to political, social, and sociopsychological needs and positions. Meaghan Morris, describing white Australians' knowledge of the stolen generations, differentiates between a lack of knowledge and a lack of empathy:

Only in recent years . . . has some notion of the scale of the trauma and disruption that this policy created begun to filter down to the *white* Australians in whose idealised name it was practiced. Or, rather than speaking of an “idea” filtering through, I should say that only recently have we begun to develop a collective capacity to comprehend, to empathise, to imagine that trauma and disruption.<sup>25</sup>

For Morris, this collective capacity to understand is linked to a “politics of remembering”: she argues that white Australians did *know* what was happening but did not care to *understand* what they knew. From this perspective, the “perfect stranger” represents a lack of affinity rather than a lack of knowledge. Several research participants emphasized a lack of emotional connection or understanding. For example, a West Vancouver resident and retired accountant reflected:

I used to see the headlines about how difficult it was on First Nations reserves—about suicide crises and lack of clean drinking water, for example. But I didn't used to click on the articles to read them. So I did know about the circumstances on reserves—that wasn't new to me. I just didn't have a very good understanding of what they meant. Or if I'm honest, I didn't take a huge interest. I didn't feel emotionally connected to them, I guess.<sup>26</sup>

Another research participant said:

It's not that I had never heard of residential schools. I knew about them; I would hear about them on the news now and then. . . . I just didn't understand what it *meant* for Aboriginal people. I couldn't imagine what it was like for them.<sup>27</sup>

These reflections suggest a politics of memory that involves a refusal, or an inability, to recognize the humanity of Indigenous people and the realities they live with as a result of colonialism and oppression. This lack of empathy is often related to a lack of will to act or support action for change: in interviews, non-Indigenous participants who supported political and economic change were more likely to describe emotional or personal connections to Indigenous people than those who did not support such change.

Claiming no knowledge of oppressive power relations, Janet Mawhinney argues, is indicative of white privilege.<sup>28</sup> When non-Indigenous people self-position themselves as distant from oppression and refuse to listen to the voices of the oppressed, they reinforce and normalize the oppressive power structures in which they are implicated.

## **Silence and Dehumanization**

Difficulty communicating emotion has been linked to residential school and its intergenerational effects.<sup>29</sup> One participant said:

My parents both went to residential school. They were taught to be silent, to not speak their language or talk about their people. They passed this silence on to us, my brothers and sisters. It was a type of emptiness.<sup>30</sup>

Community workers regularly cited difficulty communicating as an explanation for mental health issues, family problems, and suicide in Indigenous communities.<sup>31</sup> Many also connected this communication difficulty with dehumanization in residential schools and under colonialism more broadly. As one community worker put it:

If you're told over and over again, and you're sent the message throughout your whole life, that you're not really worth listening to—that your suffering isn't really significant, your life isn't really significant, you're inferior—I guess you begin to question why you would communicate in the first place. You're not really considered a full human capable of full suffering.<sup>32</sup>

The dehumanization of Indigenous peoples is a central and necessary feature of colonial projects.<sup>33</sup> It permits the colonizers to feel themselves superior to Indigenous people and therefore justify their appropriation of land and resources. Popular media has played a role in the dehumanization of Indigenous people since the time of early colonial encounters.<sup>34</sup> A present-day example of this phenomenon is the media's treatment of missing and murdered Indigenous women. Comparing the press coverage of missing or murdered Indigenous women with that of white women, Kristen Gilchrist concludes that Indigenous women are devalued and rendered invisible. On average, missing or murdered Indigenous women receive three and a half times less coverage than white victims. In addition, Indigenous women are depicted in a detached and impersonal way, while stories about white women include intimate and emotional portraits.<sup>35</sup>

Judith Butler, in her book *Frames of War*, argues that the media's portrayal of conflict has changed our understanding of the value of human life and cast entire populations as people who are not sufficiently alive to be worth grieving for. This effect can occur when the suffering of others is not made visible or when it is rendered illegitimate. Butler questions the political implications this effect can have. Whether a life is considered to be valuable or not is linked to the concept of "precariousness." Butler argues that all life is vulnerable and precarious but that certain populations can be considered precarious on a political level. Because of a lack of social and economic support, these populations are more exposed to poverty, violence, and death. This "politically induced" precariousness, which leaves populations dependent on help from the state that has harmed them, can be challenged through a "more inclusive and egalitarian way of recognising precariousness" as an inherent part of human life.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, in an earlier work, Butler explores how grief and loss might form the basis of political communities.<sup>37</sup> Alliances could be formed in opposition to state oppression on the basis of a shared recognition of vulnerability. Butler also considers the potential of art to counter this type of dehumanization.

Discussing the poetry of Guantanamo Bay detainees, she writes: “They are appeals. They are efforts to re-establish a social connection to the world, even when there is no concrete reason to think that any such connection is possible.”<sup>38</sup>

This theory of precariousness and “grievability” helps to show the political potential of pain-centered narratives. Indigenous participants who gave testimony were concerned not only with inspiring emotional reactions but also with the implications that their doing so had for power relations. Many noted that speaking about traumatic personal experiences brought respect from others. Telling their stories was testament to their survival, and they were honored for the strength and resilience they exhibited by their willingness to take action and speak out in the face of pressure to keep silent or internalize pain. The “victim of knowledge of hurt” made them experts from whom the dominant society could learn.<sup>39</sup> In this way, past suffering became a source of authority for speaking about injustice. This is not to say that survivors of trauma seek to “play up” their role as victim. Rather, by “holding on” to pain rather than “working through” it, those who give testimony could maintain and justify their platform for demanding change. As Ernesto Verdeja has argued, victims and their descendants have “a moral interest in knowing and publicizing the truth about human rights abuses, not in order to pursue a vindictive politics of victimhood, but as a means of achieving legitimate demands for moral recognition.”<sup>40</sup>

## **Trauma, Healing and Reconciliation**

Responses to testimony frequently involved references to trauma and healing. For example, one participant said:

The first thing that comes to mind after hearing [residential school survivor’s] story is that I hope she finds peace. I hope having her story recognised, and having people listen to it, and hopefully having things change as a result of it, lets her heal from such a traumatic past.<sup>41</sup>

Trauma, healing, and reconciliation are morally loaded concepts. This study identifies three reasons they can be problematic in the Canadian context. The first is that narratives that focus on trauma tend to emphasize victimhood rather than express agency.<sup>42</sup> This emphasis can encourage non-Indigenous audiences to adopt paternalistic attitudes toward Indigenous peoples, leading to narratives of “helpless therapeutic subjects in need of externally administered healing.”<sup>43</sup>

Second, emphasizing trauma in Indigenous communities risks “naturalising” it as a feature of Indigenous lives.<sup>44</sup> This emphasis obscures the colonial roots of trauma and can result in non-Indigenous audiences thinking of its manifestations as an “Indian problem” rather than a settler one.<sup>45</sup> Jo-Ann Episkewnew argues that it is colonialism that is sick and requires a cure but that as long as trauma is considered inherent in Indigenous lives, structural inequalities will remain invisible and unquestioned.<sup>46</sup>

Third, framing systematic problems in psychological terms can detract from a focus on the political, social, and economic demands of Indigenous people.<sup>47</sup> According to a 2008 survey, the majority of Canadians believe the provision of counseling to be the most important contributor to reconciliation.<sup>48</sup> Their perspective contrasts with Indigenous discourses on reconciliation, which encompass a wide spectrum of issues, such as climate justice, land rights, and self-determination. Roland Chrisjohn, Sherri L. Young, and Michael Maraun argue that “symptoms of psychological distress” such as low self-esteem, alcoholism, and violent tendencies are not a distinct psychological phenomenon (labeled by some as “Residential School Syndrome”) but the “well-known and long-studied response of human beings living under conditions of severe and



prolonged oppression.” From this perspective, dismantling systems of oppression is more important than therapeutic healing—but the importance of structural change can be obscured by trauma-centered narratives.<sup>49</sup>

While these three problematics warrant careful consideration, it would be wrong to dismiss narratives of trauma and healing as unhelpful to reconciliation. Matt James insists that individual, emotional, and psychological conceptions of reconciliation are not “imposed fabrications of the dominant society” but “reflect, however partially, Indigenous aspirations and needs.”<sup>50</sup> Many of the participants in this research repeatedly declared that healing was critically needed in Indigenous communities. One community worker said simply, “Communities are traumatized, and not having reconciliation is killing our people.”<sup>51</sup>

It also became clear that Indigenous understandings of “trauma” and “healing” often differed from dominant definitions. “Trauma” is a label used for many problems in Indigenous communities, such as abuse, neglect, anxiety, suicide, poverty, violence, depression, unemployment, low self-esteem, emotional numbness, and drug and alcohol dependence.<sup>52</sup> But trauma is also understood within a historical and social context that acknowledges its causes and its intergenerational transmission. Bonnie Burstow and Eduardo Duran and Bonnie Duran describe how the concept of “community trauma” relates to Indigenous communities: it implies not that everyone in the community is traumatized but that the community itself, interpreted as an integral whole, is traumatized.<sup>53</sup> Many Indigenous people therefore advocate for community-based healing rather than individual-centered healing.<sup>54</sup> In this context, “healing” emphasizes the importance of relationships to others and connection to tradition, land, and ancestors.

## **Asymmetrical Communicative Flows and Justice**

In using the term “communicative justice,” I draw on Iris Marion Young’s theory of “communicative democracy.”<sup>55</sup> Young highlights the communicative obstacles that historically marginalized groups face and argues that communicative democracy—rather than deliberative democracy—could open a path for storytelling, rhetoric, and other forms of communication frequently employed by marginalized groups to provide a basis for participatory, democratic engagement. Communicative justice does not imply equal or reciprocal communication but rather communicative flows that compensate for structural inequalities.

John Paul Lederach’s conflict transformation approach stresses the importance of compassion and intercultural understanding—often achieved through conversation and dialogue—in reconciliation.<sup>56</sup> The role of the privileged listener, however, is often underanalyzed in reconciliation processes. Donna Houston, Gregory Martin, and Peter McLaren argue: “As much as anti-racist and decolonial pedagogies require open dialogue and intercultural collaboration, they also require critical listening on the part of white people.”<sup>57</sup> Teresa Godwin Phelps describes how, in countries emerging from periods of oppression and violence, it is often the oppressors who have “had the microphone.” Passing over this microphone, she points out, is a starting point for a more just public sphere.<sup>58</sup> Young also emphasizes the importance of the structurally privileged listening to the structurally oppressed. For Young, this dynamic would help to ensure justice by providing mechanisms for the voices and perspectives of the oppressed to be recognized and represented.<sup>59</sup>

One non-Indigenous participant emphasized the significance of listening to Indigenous stories and connected the act of listening to the processes of reflection and learning:

I suppose it's our turn to shut up and listen. First Nations stories have been overlooked for so long, and it's high time that white Canadians listen to them, think them through and learn from them. We don't need to add our own stories about white Canada—they're already well known. What we need to do is reflect on First Nations stories, and use them as tools to change ourselves and—perhaps—change our society.<sup>60</sup>

An Indigenous participant, who is a filmmaker, said:

Too often there's an expectation that we should learn all about tolerance and fairness from Canadians. But that perspective totally fails to recognise that they've been forcefully preaching to us for hundreds of years, and have often been pretty hypocritical about it. What we need is our turn in the spotlight—our turn to step forward, lay out our visions for what we want for ourselves and our children, and we need them to listen up and pay attention to us. It's time for Canadians to recognise all the things they can – and need to—learn from First Nations people if we're to make this country a fair place for all.<sup>61</sup>

Reconciliation processes can be understood as sites of learning. Michael Welton argues that “political listening” is an important pedagogical practice in circumstances of socioeconomic inequalities and cultural conflict. For Welton, the act of listening is connected to struggles for recognition and respect among those who are often excluded from the mainstream public sphere. He writes: “The powerful and the privileged—those who simply assume their voices will command attention in public spaces—are being challenged to open their ears to the silenced who speak in different accents, tonalities and colourations.”<sup>62</sup>

The impact of political listening is difficult to measure. There is a chasm between individual reflection and social transformation, even though individual reflection may serve as a first step. Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang are critical of the use of the term “decolonization” as a metaphor for conscientization. They ask whether conscientization could actually represent a settler “move towards innocence,” which does more to reinforce the idea of Canadian identity as liberal, tolerant, and inclusive than to disrupt oppressive power structures or bring about social change.<sup>63</sup> Other critics argue, however, that settler introspection is an important requirement for reconciliation in Canada. Paulette Regan proposes that residential schools reconciliation should take place within the wider context of exposing the nation's colonial origins. Her analysis looks beyond the widespread focus on the “Indian problem” to uncover the “settler problem” relating to structural inequalities and oppression.<sup>64</sup> Hearing stories from residential school survivors, Regan argues, can be a decolonizing experience for the Canadian settler population through the development of critical self-knowledge. For many of the non-Indigenous participants, listening inspired critical self-reflection. Self-reflection involves a recognition of entrenched structural inequalities, including an examination of personal culpability in systems of oppression. It is often inspired by a desire to bring about better intergroup relations based on understanding and respect. For example, one research participant said:

I came to realize that if non-Indigenous Canada and Indigenous people are to build better relations, it's not enough for us just to say sorry. What we have to do is to devote ourselves to listening and understanding their experiences. And then we have to learn from them—we have to go away and make changes to the way that we personally do things, because we are all bound up in this and we all have responsibility in it, and we also have to recognise our responsibility to work for change at a bigger level.<sup>65</sup>

Listening can also be understood as a form of witnessing, which plays a central role in truth commissions and is often considered to be a starting point for reconciliation.<sup>66</sup> Witnessing exists in a transactive relationship with testimony: a speech act directed toward another, with the central aim of placing a moral obligation of response on the listener. For Dori Laub, the listener is an “enabler of testimony.”<sup>67</sup> He argues that “testimony is the narrative’s address to hearing; for only when the survivor knows he is being heard, will he stop to hear—and listen—to himself.”<sup>68</sup> From this perspective, testimony functions not as a monologue but as an address to the listener, who will become a co-owner and participant in the traumatic event.<sup>69</sup>

Roger I. Simon describes two types of reaction to testimony: spectatorial and summoned. A spectatorial sensibility embodies an understanding of the testimony in a way that may evoke inspiration, sadness, delight, or disgust. But it does not evoke obligation to act. A summoned sensibility, by contrast, “instantiates the proximity of self and another, an Other who calls, who summons me, and who thus puts me under an encumbrance in which I must consider my response-ability.”<sup>70</sup> A summoned witness learns not just *about* a story but *from* a story and reflects on what the story tells about the storyteller and about the listener.<sup>71</sup> A summoned witness takes co-ownership of the story and responds to its affective claim for recognition and response. Simon stresses the importance of a “sphere of public memory as a transactional space, not for the consolidation of national memory but for mobilising practices of remembrance-learning . . . in which one’s stories might be shifted by the stories of others.”<sup>72</sup> The words and actions of non-Indigenous research participants suggest that there is a correlation between political listening and a summoned response to testimony or story. Listeners who engage in critical self-reflection are more likely to engage in activism beyond the discursive.

## **Communication and Reconciliation**

Restorying the past and amplifying alternative narratives about the future are just part of the work needed to achieve justice and equality for Indigenous peoples in Canada. Listening and reflection are not substitutes for necessary legal, economic, and social reforms. But communication can play a significant role within wider movements for justice and reconciliation. Representation and narratives have had a core role in implementing and sustaining the settler-colonial system, and representation and narratives can also potentially play a role in challenging and dismantling it.

Reconciliation, for many non-Indigenous Canadians, evokes both hopes and fears. Many are hopeful that reconciliation will help to create a “fairer Canada,” a “more just Canada,” and a “brighter future for everyone.”<sup>73</sup> But reconciliation also involves facing uncomfortable truths about the systemic oppression of Indigenous people and the implications that this oppression has for Canadian settler identities. Tuck and Yang maintain that “directly and indirectly benefiting from the erasure and assimilation of Indigenous peoples is a difficult reality for settlers to accept.”<sup>74</sup> Many non-Indigenous people do recognize this reality when questioned but find it difficult to dwell on the subject. As one participant put it: “To recognize that you benefited from a system of genocide isn’t exactly a walk in the park.”<sup>75</sup>

The work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, however, as well as increased media attention to reconciliation in Canada, has placed Indigenous suffering on public record and helped to shape a national narrative that recognizes (to a degree) the colonial root of this suffering. This increased awareness has made it difficult for non-Indigenous people to deny responsibility for harm doing—not through individual action but through social identification as members of a group that benefited from colonial and genocidal policies. For non-Indigenous

people, listening and critical self-reflection can challenge accepted accounts of self, history, and nation. From these new understandings comes the possibility of personal and social transformation.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Jeff Corntassel, Chaw-win-is, and T'lakwadzi, "Indigenous Storytelling, Truth-Telling, and Community Approaches to Reconciliation," *ESC: English Studies in Canada* 35, no. 1 (2009): 137–159.

<sup>2</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* (Toronto: James Lorimer, 2015), 1: ix.

<sup>3</sup> Matt James, "A Carnival of Truth? Knowledge, Ignorance, and the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission," *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 6, no. 2 (2012): 182–204.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Ifat Maoz, Zvi Bekerman, and Mara Getz Sheftel, "Can Talking to Each Other Really Make a Difference? Perspectives on Reconciliation-Aimed Dialogues in the Conflict between Israeli-Jews and Palestinians," in *Beyond Bullets and Bombs: Grassroots Peacebuilding between Israelis and Palestinians*, ed. Judy Kuriansky (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2007); Stephen Ryan, "Peacebuilding Strategies and Intercommunal Conflict: Approaches to the Transformation of Divided Societies," *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 2, no. 2 (2007): 216–231; J. F. Bourquin, *Violence, Conflict, and Intercultural Dialogue* (Strasbourg, Germany: Council of Europe, 2003).

<sup>5</sup> Interview with research participant, December 3, 2015. All interviews with the author were conducted in confidentiality and the names of the interviewees are withheld by mutual agreement.

<sup>6</sup> Tom Clark, Ravi de Costa, and Sarah Maddison, "Non-Indigenous People and the Limits of Settler Colonial Reconciliation," in *The Limits of Settler Colonial Reconciliation: Non-Indigenous People and the Responsibility to Engage*, ed. Sarah Maddison, Tom Clark, and Ravi de Costa (Singapore: Springer, 2016), 4, 8.

<sup>7</sup> Anna Haebich, "'Between Knowing and Not Knowing': Public Knowledge of the Stolen Generations," *Aboriginal History* 25 (2001): 86–87.

<sup>8</sup> Susan Dion, *Braiding Histories: Learning from Aboriginal Peoples' Experiences and Perspectives* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2009), 179.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Interview with research participant, September 15, 2015.

<sup>11</sup> StatCan, *Aboriginal Peoples in Canada: First Nations People, Métis, and Inuit*, 2011, available at <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/as-sa/99-011-x/99-011-x2011001-eng.cfm>.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with research participant, December 6, 2015.

<sup>13</sup> Haebich, "Between Knowing and Not Knowing," 71, 79.

<sup>14</sup> For example, a 1970 CBC radio program told the story of two Indigenous residential school students who were forced to speak English and as a result lost their native language (available from CBC digital archives at <http://www.cbc.ca/archives/entry/losing-native-languages>). In 1990, abuse at residential schools received widespread media coverage when First Nations leader Phil Fontaine spoke publicly about the abuse he had experienced at Fort Alexander School (one 1990 CBC current affairs program, *The National*, is available from the CBC archives at <http://www.cbc.ca/archives/entry/native-leader-charges-church-with-abuse>). Another 1990 current affairs program, *The Journal*, focuses on the Catholic Church's response to the abuse charges: <http://www.cbc.ca/archives/entry/the-catholic-church-responds-to-fontaines-abuse-charges>). The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, which operated from 1992 to 1996, and the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, which operated from 1998 to 2014, also received high profile—if sporadic—media coverage (see, for example, <http://www.cbc.ca/archives/entry/the-churches-explain> and <http://www.cbc.ca/archives/entry/wheres-the-money-for-healing>). The film *Where the Spirit Lives* (1989) shows a dramatized version of residential schools, and, in the early twenty-first century, "remains the most watched fictional representation of an issue that haunts both Canada and the United States" (Mary Jane Miller, "Where the Spirit Lives: An Influential and Contentious Drama about Residential Schools," *American Review of Canadian Studies* 31, nos. 1–2 [2001] 71). Numerous memoirs about residential school were published in the latter half of the twentieth century, including Jane Willis, *Geniesh: An Indian Girlhood* (1973); Basil Johnston, *Indian School Days* (1988); Anthony Apakark Thrasher, *Skid Row Eskimo* (1976); Eleanor Brass, *I Walk in Two Worlds* (1987); and Isabelle Knockwood, *Out of Depths: The Experiences of Mi'kmaq Children at the Indian Residential School at Shubenacadie* (1994). There were also history books, such as Agnes Grants, *No End of Grief: Indian Residential Schools in Canada* (1996); school histories, such as Celia Haig-Brown,

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*Resistance and Renewal: Surviving the Indian Residential School* (1988); literary works, such as Lorne Joseph Simon, *Stones and Switches* (1994); and children's books, such as Shirley Stirling, *My Name is Seepeetza* (1993).

<sup>15</sup> Interview with research participant, March 26, 2016.

<sup>16</sup> Sarah Maddison, "Postcolonial Guilt and National Identity: Historical Injustice and the Australian Settler State," *Journal for the Study of Race, Nation and Culture* 18, no. 6 (2011): 698.

<sup>17</sup> Sonia Roccas, Yechiel Klan, and Ido Liviatan, "Exonerating Cognitions, Group Identification, and Personal Values as Predictors of Collective Guilt among Jewish-Israelis," in *Collective Guilt: International Perspectives*, ed. Nyla R. Branscome and Bertjan Doojse (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 131.

<sup>18</sup> Daniel Sal  , "Indigenous People and Settler Angst in Canada: A Review Essay," *International Journal of Canadian Studies* 41 (2010): 315–333.

<sup>19</sup> David C. Williams, "In Praise of Guilt: How the Yearning for Moral Purity Blocks Reparations for Native Americans," in *Reparations for Indigenous Peoples: International and Comparative Perspectives*, ed. Federico Lenzerini (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 246.

<sup>20</sup> Interview with non-Indigenous research participant, February 23, 2016.

<sup>21</sup> Interview with research participant, April 12, 2016.

<sup>22</sup> Amy Bombay, Kim Matheson, and Hymie Anisman, "Intergenerational Trauma: Convergence of Multiple Processes among First Nations Peoples in Canada," *Journal of Aboriginal Health*, November 2009, 6–47.

<sup>23</sup> Ronald Niezen, *Truth and Indignation: Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission on Indian Residential Schools* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014).

<sup>24</sup> Thomas Tufte, "Entertainment-education in Development Communication: Between Marketing Behaviours and Empowering People," in *Media and Global Change: Rethinking Communication for Development*, ed. Oscar Hemer and Thomas Tufte, 159–174 (Buenos Aires: Clacso, 2005).

<sup>25</sup> Meaghan Morris, *Identity Anecdotes: Translation and Media Culture* (London: Sage, 2006), 107.

<sup>26</sup> Interview with research participant, August 2, 2016.

<sup>27</sup> Interview with research participant, December 2, 2015.

<sup>28</sup> Janet Mawhinney, "'Giving up the Ghost': Disrupting the Reproduction of White Privilege in Anti-racist Pedagogy and Organisational Change" (master's thesis, University of Toronto, 1998), 103, [http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/obj/s4/f2/dsk2/tape15/PQDD\\_0008/MQ33991.pdf](http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/obj/s4/f2/dsk2/tape15/PQDD_0008/MQ33991.pdf).

<sup>29</sup> Bombay, Matheson, and Anisman, "Intergenerational Trauma."

<sup>30</sup> Interview with research participant, July 15, 2015.

<sup>31</sup> Interviews with community workers between September 2015 and May 2016.

<sup>32</sup> Interview with community worker, May 23, 2016.

<sup>33</sup> Ward Churchill, *Kill the Indian, Save the Man: The Genocidal Impact of American Indian Residential Schools* (San Francisco, CA: City Lights, 2004).

<sup>34</sup> See, for example, Emma LaRocque, *When the Other Is Me: Native Resistance Discourse, 1850–1990* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2011).

<sup>35</sup> Kristen Gilchrist, "'Newsworthy Victims?' Exploring differences in Canadian Local Press Coverage of Missing/Murdered Aboriginal and White Women," *Feminist Media Studies* 10, no. 4 (2010): 373–390.

<sup>36</sup> Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (London: Verso, 2009), 25–26, 13.

<sup>37</sup> Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Power of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2006).

<sup>38</sup> Butler, *Frames of War* 59–60.

<sup>39</sup> James, "Carnival of Truth?," 200.

<sup>40</sup> Ernesto Verdeja, *Unchopping a Tree: Reconciliation in the Aftermath of Political Violence* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009), 13.

<sup>41</sup> Interview with research participant, January 24, 2016.

<sup>42</sup> Antonio Traverso and Mick Broderick, "Interrogating Trauma: Towards a Critical Trauma Studies," *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies* 24, no. 1 (2011): 7.

<sup>43</sup> James, "Carnival of Truth?," 197.

<sup>44</sup> Patricia Monture-Angus, *Thunder in My Soul: A Mohawk Woman Speaks* (Halifax, NS: Fernwood, 1995).

<sup>45</sup> Paulette Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within: Indian Residential Schools, Truth Telling and Reconciliation in Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010).

<sup>46</sup> Jo-Ann Episkenew, *Taking Back Our Spirits: Indigenous Literature, Public Policy and Healing* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2009), 11.

<sup>47</sup> Roland Chrisjohn, Sherri L. Young, and Michael Maraun, *The Circle Game: Shadows and Substance in the Indian Residential School Experience in Canada* (Penticton, BC: Theytus Books, 1997).

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- <sup>49</sup> Chrisjohn, Young and Maraun, *Circle Game*, 1–4.
- <sup>50</sup> James, “Carnival of Truth?,” 199.
- <sup>51</sup> Interview with research participant, July 13, 2015.
- <sup>52</sup> Bombay, Matheson, and Anisman, “Intergenerational Trauma,” 7.
- <sup>53</sup> Bonnie Burstow, “Toward a Radical Understanding of Trauma and Trauma Work,” *Violence against Women* 9, (11), 2003, 1293–1317. (11), 2003, 1293–1317. (11), 2003, 1293–1317.no. 11 (2003): 1293–1317; Eduardo Duran and Bonnie Duran, *Native American postcolonial Psychology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995).
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- <sup>56</sup> John Paul Lederach, *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
- <sup>57</sup> Donna Houston, Gregory Martin, and Peter McLaren, “In the Market for Reconciliation?,” in *Reconciliation and Pedagogy*, ed. Pal Ahluwalia, Stephen Atkinson, Peter Bishop, Pam Christie, Robert Hattam, and Julie Matthews (London: Routledge, 2012), 131.
- <sup>58</sup> Teresa Godwin Phelps, *Shattered Voices: Language, Violence, and the Work of Truth Commissions* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 80.
- <sup>59</sup> Iris Marion Young “Polity and Group Difference: A Critique of the Ideal of Universal Citizenship,” *Ethics* 99, no. 2 (1989): 258.
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- <sup>62</sup> Michael Welton, “Listening, Conflict and Citizenship: Towards a Pedagogy of Civil Society,” *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 21, no. 3 (2002): 197.
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- <sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 57, 70.
- <sup>70</sup> Roger I. Simon, “The Touch of the Past: The Pedagogical Significance of a Transactional Sphere of Public Memory,” in *Revolutionary Pedagogies: Cultural Politics, Instituting Education, and the Discourse of Theory*, ed. Peter Pericles Trifonas (London: Routledge, 2000), 66.
- <sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.
- <sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.
- <sup>73</sup> Interviews with research participants, December 2015 to April 2016.
- <sup>74</sup> Tuck and Yang, “Decolonisation,” 9.
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